

Three Options for Deaf Education Reform

Submitted by Council for Deaf and Hard of Hearing
July 1, 2008

Deaf Education Reform Options

Background

The Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) is submitting this document in anticipation of the three day planning meeting on deaf and blind education being held in late July, 2008 as sponsored by the Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE).

According to the Office of Performance Evaluations' 2005 report on the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind (ISDB), "any significant changes should be accompanied by detailed analyses of how well students will be served, fiscal tradeoffs, facility use, and logistical constraints."¹

On April 27, 2007, Dr. Ron Schow submitted a report to the SBOE (See Summative Report, Appendices) in which he explored the structure and function of proposed regional programs and concluded 8 magnate schools throughout the state could continue to provide services for younger deaf students and that only two regions (Magic Valley and Treasure Valley) would have sufficient numbers of signing deaf students to allow a reasonable program for older students (ages 13-21) if all students were urged to stay in their own regions. Other older students around the state would be forced into Level I (inferior) education options if they stayed in their own regions. Therefore two central school options were explored in his report. Option 1 proposed smaller programs in both locations while Option II proposed a combined program in the Treasure Valley. (See the original report for a detailed analysis of these options)

Therefore, his report proposed that in addition to the central school(s) for older children the plan for deaf and hard of hearing education would need to include 1) a central staff, 2) an oral aural program for CI students 3), the continuation of magnet/LEA programs for younger children with support from a state funding formula, 4) an outreach program similar to the one currently in place to continue early intervention efforts and for support of LEAs where there are deaf children, 5) additional audiologists to provide regional services for hard of hearing children, and 6) services for multi-handicapped children. The services for blind/visually impaired students are a separate matter, but may eventually be provided with those for the deaf/hard of hearing.

Three Options

The CDHH feels there are actually three options that might be explored for a central school. In order to update Schow's report we have added a third feasible option, namely, leaving the central school in its current location. Our suggestion is that one of these three options will be the mostly likely desired outcome from the current restructuring effort. We feel it is crucial that any comprehensive plan must include a central school and a central staff through which the funds are funneled in order to provide oversight and a fair distribution of monies throughout the state. We have a list of advantages and disadvantages of all options.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Option I (*Relocate school to Treasure Valley*)

Advantages:

- 1) Program located in urban area with advantages for the largest group of students to be served locally, for recruiting high and well qualified staff, and for acclimating students with the urban environment where many will eventually locate, etc.
- 2) Most central location for northern, central and southern Idaho.
- 3) This location will likely draw the largest possible number of students and therefore provide a very adequate critical mass.
- 4) The large critical mass of students will assure the best possible program in terms of direct instruction and social/educational advantages.
- 5) Parents will be willing to relocate due to better job opportunities for them.

Disadvantages

- 1) Will need to obtain new physical facility with cost of rent or purchase.
- 2) Further for southern Idaho students than Gooding location.
- 3) Current staff will need to relocate and some may not do so.
- 4) Many uncertainties are associated with moving the staff, finding facilities and creating the same high quality program as the one currently in Gooding.
- 5) Possible economic impact on the city of Gooding.

Option II (*Two central schools in Magic Valley and Treasure Valley*)

Advantages

- 1) Two groups of students will have a central location.
- 2) Two central locations will serve the largest number of students locally compared to the other options.
- 3) These two programs will each likely have an adequate critical mass of students.
- 4) Both central programs should be adequate.
- 5) One of the programs will have the use of existing facilities without rent or purchase expense.

Disadvantages

- 1) Neither program will have the critical mass available in Option I and therefore the social and educational programs will both have lesser quality than is possible in Option I.
- 2) There will be costs for rent or purchase of physical facilities in the Treasure Valley.
- 3) Uncertainties will be troublesome in terms of having two programs instead of one and of locating and staffing the new program in the Treasure Valley.
- 4) Due to a limited pool of qualified staff, there will be a shortage in qualified specialists, teachers and staff to fill two locations.

Option III (*Leaving the school in current location*)

Advantages

- 1) Excellent physical facilities are available without cost of rental or purchase.
- 2) Program location in rural community with advantages in avoiding urban

crime or risks.

- 3) Avoid all the unknowns of moving the school and staff.

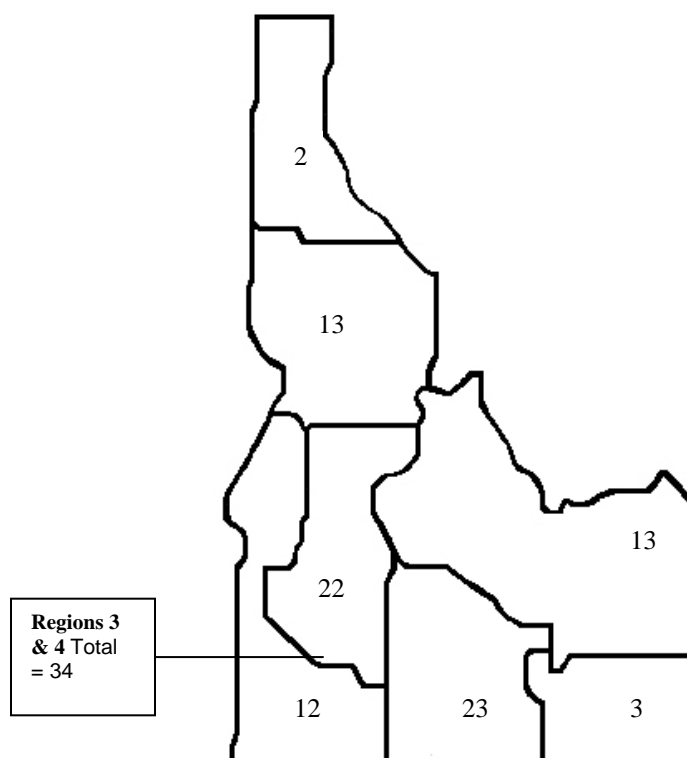
Disadvantages

- 1) This location will likely draw fewer students to the central program as compared to Option I because it is not located in the largest metropolitan area.
- 2) This program may not be as strong in social and educational advantages for the students as compared to Option I because of a smaller size student population.
- 3) Staff hiring may be more difficult because of location as compared to Option I
- 4) Parents' resistance to relocate due to lack of job opportunities available for them.
- 5) This location receives less exposure of 'real world'. Students would not be fully prepared to encounter the world when they graduate.

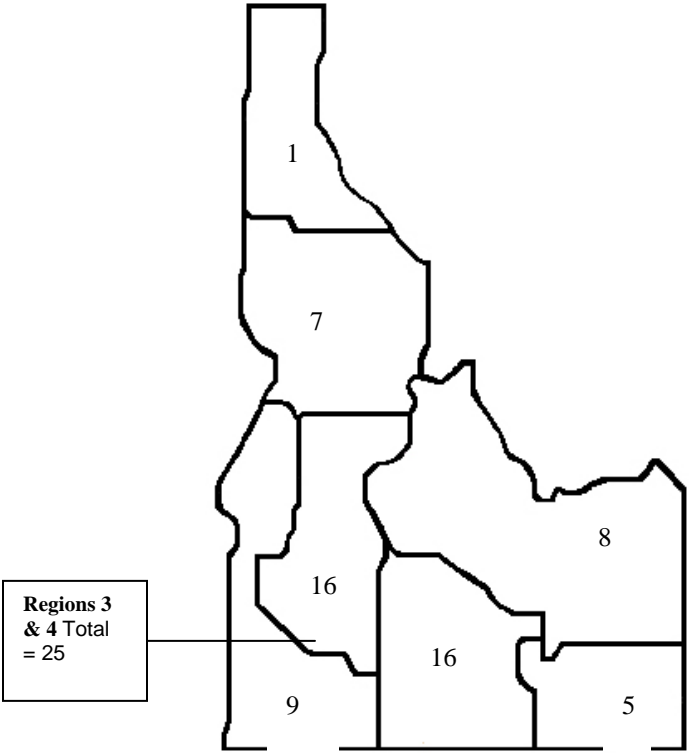
Appendix 1

Demographic Maps as of May 31, 2006

Statewide Signing Students' by Region (Birth to 12)



Signing Students by Region (Age 13-21)



Signing Students by Region (All Ages)

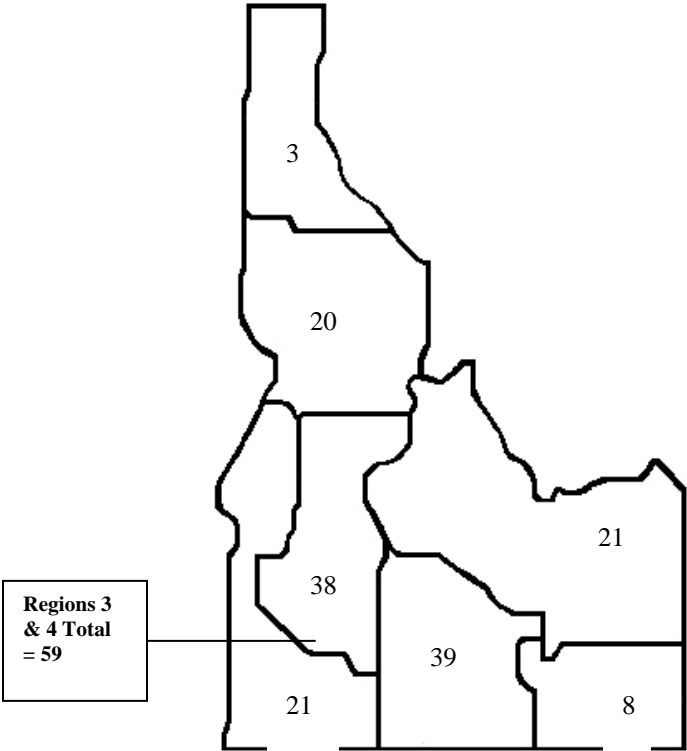
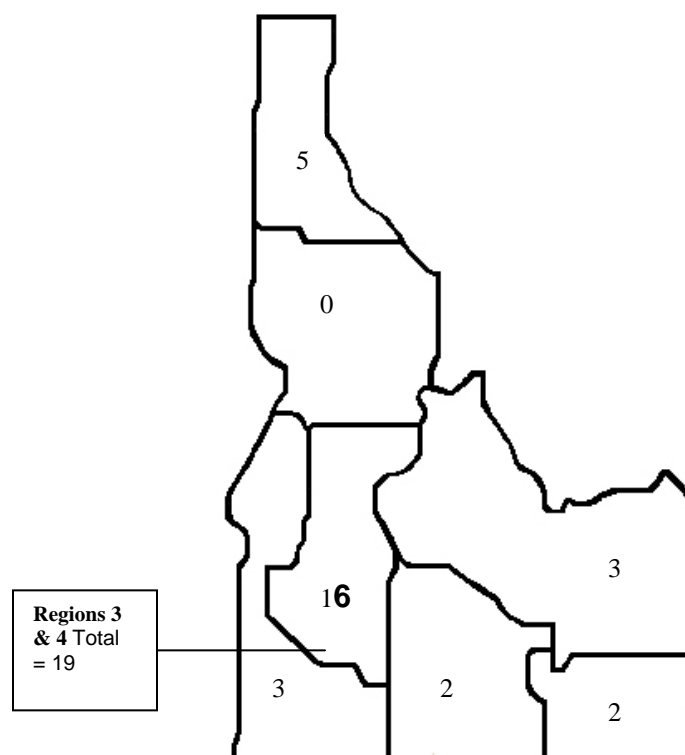


Figure 6: Statewide Auditory-Oral Implanted Students by Region (All Ages)



*Note, there are more implanted students in Idaho than the ones listed above, but the students included in the charts and tables above are those who use auditory-oral methods to communicate, not sign language.

